

Manage Your Way to Quicker Meals

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Quick meals can be as enjoyable, creative, and satisfying as meals prepared in more time-consuming ways—but they don't just happen. Sometime, somewhere, work must be done—if not by you then by someone else. Application of work simplification principles as well as those of nutrition and of food preparation, an efficient kitchen arrangement, good tools and skill in using them, established routines, and a real need for quick meals are necessary. Thinking ahead and doing some of the preparation at other than mealtime helps.

A questioning mind is helpful, too. Without it, we stay in well-worn ruts; with it, there is no limit to what we can accomplish. Ask yourself at every step:

- Is this necessary?
- Could someone else do it better? Or as well?
- Would it be better to do it somewhere else or at some other time?
- Is there a quicker or easier way to do it?

The ideas which follow involve management. Not all of them will apply in every situation. Possibilities are suggested—the decisions are yours.

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ESTABLISH ROUTINES FOR REPETITIVE OPERATIONS

Menu Planning

Develop basic patterns for the day's meals and secure originality by varying the choices you make to fill in the patterns.*

Quick meals may involve teaching your family to appreciate simple meals, to like foods served in simple forms, to like a variety of foods, and to eat what is served. Try to:

- Limit the number of dishes requiring much preparation to one or two per meal. For example, serve simple desserts such as ice cream, crackers and cheese, or fruit, and reserve fancy desserts for special occasions.
- Limit the variety of foods served at any one meal. Encourage the hungry by offering seconds of one food rather than a choice of items to fill up on; recognize individual preferences by catering to one person one time and someone else the next rather than to all at one meal; and serve small portions—not different foods—to youngsters or those counting calories. If special foods must be prepared for one person, try to use many of the same ingredients for the foods served to the rest of the family.

Most food combinations will be satisfactory provided the day's meals include at least the minimum number of servings from each of the recommended Basic Four Food Groups.* If the items from which choices can be made are kept on hand, you can fill in each menu pattern when you wish—at mealtime or a day or more ahead—choosing from what is available, is most perishable, or has greatest appeal at the moment. Needed will be basic staples and enough meats, vegetables, and fruits to give substance and variety for the interval between trips to the market.

Marketing

Keep on hand the items you use frequently and have some simple system for reminding yourself when to buy refills.

Before each market trip count the number of breakfasts, lunches, and dinners to be served before the next trip and, from this, determine the number of times you will serve meat, fruits, and vegetables. Note separately your needs for citrus fruits, dark-green or deep-yellow vegetables, and salad greens. Choose these items from what appeals among the store's offerings.

Commercially prepared mixes or partly or fully prepared foods may be substituted for unprocessed foods, but you will want to balance cost, nutrition, and acceptability against the timesaving possibilities.

* Information on the subjects starred throughout this bulletin is available in texts on nutrition and meal planning and in bulletins from the New York State College of Home Economics at Cornell University or from the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Learn the floor plan of the store where you do most of your buying, and arrange your grocery list so that the various food groups are in a sequence which will avoid the necessity for retracing steps.

If you need to count costs in money as well as costs in time, choice making will be easier—and therefore faster—if you:

- Know the approximate amount you can afford to spend per week.
- Pay particular attention to cost per serving for major items.

	Low	Liberal
Dairy products	up to 5¢	over 10¢
Fruits	6¢	10¢
Meats	25¢	35¢
Vegetables	4¢	7¢

- Know what foods are in season and the best buys for the week.
- Learn to judge quality, especially of fresh products.
- Make food labels work for you.

With sufficient refrigerator, freezer, and other storage space you may find it possible to limit major shopping trips to one or two a month with short trips weekly for perishables.

Preparation

Work out general procedures for the day's menu patterns, adjusting them as needed for each day's specific choices. Check each menu to make sure that you don't have too many things to do at the last minute. Dovetail operations wherever possible, preparing first the food which keeps best when two things require the same time or equipment. Then calculate backwards from the serving time to determine when to start preparations.

See what you can delegate to others. Supervision takes time and for simple meals you may work faster alone. However, for more complicated meals, time pressures are lessened by having someone else set the table, mash potatoes, or toss a salad. Such help is most beneficial if you can: (1) have two separate places to work in the kitchen, and (2) train your helpers so they develop specialties of their own and can work without supervision.

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Match your cooking methods with the time you have available:

- Oven use may lengthen cooking time but require a minimum of attention thus speeding meal preparation by leaving you free to do other things. Use your oven to oven-fry chicken; cook stews, chops, hamburgers, and bacon; bake fish; brown meat balls, pot roasts, and nuts; oven steam vegetables; or cook whole meals.
- Rotisserie use may relieve the pressure on other appliances and require little attention, but special equipment is needed and there are only a limited number of foods that can be cooked this way.
- Broiler use may shorten cooking time but requires precise timing and last minute attention. Meats, fish, poultry, and pre-cooked and some raw vegetables and fruits may be broiled together for truly quick meals.
- Range top cooking may be fast but requires time for stirring or turning.

Plan so your work flows from one work place to the next with a minimum of backtracking. Make it a habit to:

- Assemble everything you need that is not right at your finger tips before you begin to put a recipe together.
- Plan preparations so utensils can be re-used without washing.
- Anticipate needs so trips are used for more than one purpose.
- Position tools and materials to reduce "pick up and put down."
- Make both hands work for you—as when putting cookies into a jar, stacking dishes on a tray, or setting a table.

Know cooking times and learn and become skillful in the use of generally accepted methods of cooking. Develop standard procedures for repetitive operations such as setting the table, baking cookies, or broiling meats.

Accept some foods in other than their usual forms. The food is not any less good, just different. For instance, you might:

- Prepare dropped biscuits instead of rolled ones; or for rolled ones, knead the dough right in the mixing bowl, pat it out on a cookie sheet, and cut it with a dull knife.
- Serve food in simple forms—potatoes in their jackets or baked, vegetables buttered or with thin cream or top milk substituted for cream sauce, and pan gravy in place of thickened gravy.
- Mix cookies and shortened cakes by the dump method.
- Use salad oil instead of melting shortening.
- Substitute canned soups for many varieties of cream sauces.

Develop meals and dishes which you do easily and well and keep on hand supplies for one or two such meals.

Put into your permanent file only those recipes you have tried and found satisfactory. Untried recipes and menus are seldom quick and only clutter up a permanent file. For each recipe include: (1) the yield, the pan size, baking temperature, and baking time; (2) the ingredients in order of use; directions in the actual work sequence; and (3) descriptive terms such as "shredded" and "cut" before the ingredient if the process is carried out before measuring, after the ingredient if the process is carried out after measuring.

Service

Regardless of the type of service used, work can be simplified if: (1) there is adequate space for dishing up food, (2) serving dishes are stored at point of first use, (3) help from others is utilized, and (4) the mechanics of the service are familiar to everyone concerned.

The use of a cart or trays may help to reduce the number of trips required, but planning is necessary. For a cart to be useful, floors should be on one level and doors left open between the kitchen and the serving area. The cart should have large, swivel type, rubber-tired wheels, and there should be a slight edge to prevent items from falling off.

For a tray to be useful, there should be a place to set it down while it is being loaded and unloaded. The tray should be light but sturdy, large enough to hold several items, have a rim, and be easy to grasp.

Cleanup

Clean up as you go. Waiting time can be productive, and it is surprising how much easier and quicker the whole task seems if you:

- Wash utensils, pots, and pans as you finish with them.
- Soak stubborn pieces. To simplify cleaning broiler pans, sprinkle the *hot* grid with detergent, and cover with a wet cloth or paper towels. The food particles will loosen by dishwashing time.
- Between courses, scrape, rinse, and stack soiled dishes and place them near the sink ready for washing.
- Take care of leftovers as they are brought from the table.

To further simplify cleanup:

- Use disposable materials—aluminum foil, paper, transparent plastic, or polyethylene containers or wrappings; paper sacks for flouring meats, sugaring doughnuts, and reheating rolls; and newspapers for the peelings from fruits and vegetables.



- Add a little fat to foaming foods to prevent boilovers.
- Cook foods in the containers in which they are to be served.
- Arrange meat and vegetables on one serving dish.
- Rinse in very hot water and drain dishes rather than towel-dry them.

ORGANIZE YOUR KITCHEN

A well-organized kitchen is a *must* for the production of quick meals. Organization eliminates having to think about routine jobs and it saves the time and effort of searching and backtracking. Without making major architectural changes, the organization of many kitchens can be improved. Try to:

- Provide adequate work and storage space by each major appliance—a table or cart may be substituted when no counter is available.
- Have the major appliances—cooking top, sink, and refrigerator—in as compact and efficient a work triangle as possible.
- Place refrigerator opening to serve directly to the adjoining counter.
- Store supplies and equipment at place of first use.
- Store things used frequently so they are readily accessible. Have extras of small items used at more than one center.
- Provide plenty of shadowless light.
- Have a place for everything and return everything to its place.

A reminder: One way to have work and storage space where you need it is to eliminate equipment and supplies that you don't use!

CHOOSE GOOD EQUIPMENT AND DEVELOP SKILL IN USING IT

Hand Tools

Choose those that do more than one job, or that do one repetitive or difficult job supremely well. Avoid gadgets. Helpful for the preparation of quick meals are: sharp knives—paring or utility, slicing, saw-toothed, and French; long handled measuring cups and spoons; transparent graduated cup, pint, and quart measures with a pouring lip; aluminum cups and fractions of cups for dry measures; a good rotary beater; spatulas, flexible rubber scraper, kitchen shears, peeler with a floating blade, pastry blender, tongs, wooden spoons, minute minder, and a meat thermometer; vegetable brush and plastic pan cleaner. Practice using these tools so you become proficient in their use and familiar with their many possibilities.

Cooking Pots and Pans

Purchase only those which you will use frequently enough to justify storage room. When selecting these few, consider the following:

- Time required for range top cooking will be minimized if foods can be placed in shallow pans with flat bottoms and tight fitting lids.
- Dishwashing is simplified if pans have rounded corners and few seams or crevices.
- "Peek-and-poke" baking with its attendant loss of time will be minimized if baking pans meet the size specifications set by the American Standards Association in cooperation with pan manufacturers. Recipes and mixes are adapted to these sizes.

Portable Cooking Appliances

Select only those which justify storage. If these are to be helpful for quick meals: (1) have circuits heavy enough to serve more than one appliance at a time (check with your electrician if fuses blow, cords get hot, or appliances are slow to heat); (2) have outlets where heating appliances are most conveniently used; and (3) avoid using household extension cords for they reduce voltage and slow up heating.

Read thoroughly the instruction booklet which accompanies each appliance. Manufacturers try to give clear-cut directions and to suggest the many uses for each piece of equipment.

Do some cooking at the table. Food for one course may be cooked while you eat another; or seconds may be cooked while firsts are being eaten. Seconds are served hot and you are with your family or guests.

DO SOME ADVANCE PREPARATION

Advance preparation enables you to work when you have few interruptions and time pressures, or to double your activity on one occasion to lessen it at another. It will not necessarily save you time—merely give you greater choice as to how you will use your time. It is practical only if it fits into your schedule naturally, not if it means constantly thinking about food and never being through with meal preparation. The following have been found helpful:

Put Foods in Their Most Usable Form Before Storage

As soon as possible after returning from the market, package those foods to be stored in the freezer, and wash, trim, and place salad greens in pliofilm bags for storage in the refrigerator.

Store foods in the freezer so as to reduce thawing time to a minimum: package



all foods in small amounts; separate chops, steaks, hamburgers, and layers of rolled pastry with two thicknesses of moisture-vapor-resistant paper; leave out one-fourth to one-third of the liquid from meat sauces—add this amount of hot liquid when the sauces are to be reheated; and remove cooked meat from the bones.

Let One Preparation Give You a Start on the Next

Combine tasks. For example, prepare enough dry biscuit or pie crust mix for several batches while mixing enough for one; double any item that will freeze well and that you are going to serve anyway and freeze the extra portion; start simple preparations for coming meals while doing the dishes.

Cook some foods for one or more meals at once. Refrigerate the extra portions and serve them in different ways. For example, cooked rice may be served on the second day in salmon patties, stuffed peppers, casseroles, stew, or soup. Cooked meat may be sliced and served cold or used in sandwiches or salads; or served hot in gravy, casseroles, meat pies, creamed dishes, or hash.

Do Some Advance Preparation on the Day of Use

Batters may be refrigerated undisturbed in their baking pans; doughs shaped on baking sheets. Yeast doughs will need to be shaped and to rise at least 2 hours at room temperature before baking. Small yeast loaves and rolls may be baked just short of browning. A final short baking then enables you to complete the browning and serve them hot with a freshly baked flavor and odor. Casseroles may be layered; meat loaves, patties, and meat balls shaped; pot roasts and meat balls browned. Some fruits may be held in a covered jar. Whole meals may be prepared for broiler or oven cooking.

Keep Partially or Fully Prepared Foods on Hand

In the refrigerator, store a variety of salad ingredients, salad dressings, rolls of cooky dough (keeps up to 2 weeks), yeast dough (keeps for 4 to 5 days), and sandwich fillings.

In the freezer, store foods which need further cooking—rolls of cooky dough, pastry rolled as circular sheets or shaped into pie tins, brown-and-serve rolls, casseroles, pies, meat sauces, chili, and soups; foods which require thawing only—cakes, sandwiches, yeast breads, nut and fruit breads, cookies, patty shells, and cream puffs; and foods ready to use still frozen—baked pie shells and ice cream.

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